

A FAMILY INHERITANCE

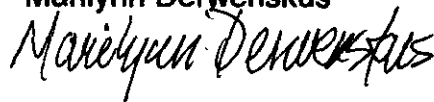
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marilynn Derwenskus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract

This collection of art is meant to visualize many of the things my family has passed down to me, and recent events in my life have given me the desire to put them on paper. The six large paintings as well as the smaller ones express my feelings and memories that I associate with each grandparent and family. Inspiration for the style of the paintings comes from my professor Marilyn Derwenskus, and when mixed with my own personal style, became a blend of abstraction and realism that creates a sense of space as well as a recognizable subject. These works have become a way for me to permanently record the role that my family has played in my life and no matter what the future holds, from now on, they will forever be remembered.

Acknowledgements

- I thank my project advisor Marilyn Derwenskus for helping me better express myself through art and words and for taking her own time to encourage all her students to become better artists.
- I give much thanks to all of my family who have helped shape the person I have become and who have been such a wonderful influence in my life.
- Thank you to the Honors College for allowing me to exhibit my work in their space.

As I live and grow, many new but inevitable experiences impress upon my life the importance of family. Until recently, I have not looked for a way to express my feelings about such things, but I have grown to a point to where I feel comfortable communicating them to others. Some choose to express themselves through words or through song, but I choose to do so through colors and images on paper. This created a great challenge for me; how does one convey feelings without words? Or how does one communicate himself through imagery? I am able to read into others' works of art, but how will I be able to make others read my work clearly? At the beginning of my honors thesis work, these questions ran through my head and still do, but I believe that I've been able to clearly put my feelings into paint and share what my family has given to me. Conflicting emotions such as loss and gain run through my paintings along with happy memories and uncertain futures which are situations that, not just I, but all of us inevitably encounter in our lives. I hope that all who see my work are able to read the stories I am telling and may feel a connection in their life as well.

Many good and bad occurrences have come upon my family recently. In the last three years, I have lost three of my four grandparents, but gained four baby cousins. My younger brother has gone away to college, and I have gotten engaged to be married. I miss the way life used to be, but also look forward to an uncertain future. The sudden experience with family death is something I never wanted to encounter, but knew that it would come. After losing one grandparent, I had little time to cherish those who were still living, for soon two more would pass on. I found myself grasping for that last link to that generation. There was so much more I wanted to learn and treasure from them all, but there I was holding the one last link to my family history and heritage. All I wanted to think about was those wonderful memories left etched in my mind, but all that was coming to mind was the foggy future without them. Eventually the fog became thinner and thinner and those memories stand out even more today. Now I see another generation being born and growing just as I have. I wonder what life will bring their way and hope that they will always seek the love and guidance of the family that surrounds them.

As I said before, my brother has left the house and gone to college. He has taken a much different path through life than I have, though we were raised in the same household. How could the same two parents produce such different and often opposite children as my brother and me? How could we grow up with such dissimilar ideas about respect and family? As I grow, I understand that the answers to these questions won't be revealed until the dust has settled, but we all know that the waiting is the hardest part. I can not impose my will on him nor can he do the same to me, though we all wish some solution could be given. While this sense of conflict and loss occurs in my family, I have become engaged to be married and join another family. The event of engagement was not the life changing moment I envisioned in my youth. Instead, my life changed day by day as we dated and got to know each other, and our engagement was just the next exciting step we were to take. Since I plan to live my life with her, I am also accepting that her family will become mine, and that I will become their family. Of course, I have never experienced such a situation in my life, so I wonder how I will influence their lives or how they will influence mine. The dynamics of all families are unique, but similar in many ways. All families experience loss and gain in different manners and with various consequences. We all have stories to tell, mine is just one of millions.

I chose to paint six paintings to represent six major influences in my life. I painted one painting for each grandparent for they all played a big part in my childhood and helped make me who I am today. One painting is about the family I live with and about the connection and relationship between my parents, my brother and myself. The last painting concerns the family I am about to enter into and how complete strangers slowly become part of each other's lives until they are considered family. Most of the content in my paintings is based on my use of color and imagery. Even though I used some text, I did not want the words to explain all the painting to the viewer. Sometimes I used color to interpret my feelings and emotions of grief I felt at the time of loss, but at other times, I used it to describe their personality and the memories that I still see. The imagery that I used mainly corresponds with symbols that

represent each subject in my mind. For example, I will always remember my grandpa Bill as a collector of any and all license plates and my grandpa Lloyd will always be associated with a B-25 Mitchell in my mind. I used trees to represent family in two of my paintings along with the color green. Trees are filled with content in their roots, trunk, limbs and leaves, so I used them to describe a family's foundation of beliefs, its history, and the future each limb holds and reaches for.

To explain to you the meaning of each work would defeat the purpose of painting. If I were to do that, I might as well have just typed a paper. I believe that each viewer can relate to the message given in each painting through their own personal experience or by just by listening and understanding what another has gone through. We all must experience the death of a loved one, but we all will see the experience differently. Some focus on life without them while others focus on the memories left behind. Some families may seem boring and inactive, but underneath it all lays a collection of desires that yearn to get out. Some people will leave their home and join with another family to start a new life together, though much adjusting is required, excitement builds as they know one day it will be worth it all. Families are always changing and evolving with the circumstances that confront them. I know that in six months, if I were to paint all these subjects again, all six would be slightly different because life would have changed me since then, but these paintings explain where I am today.





LOVE BOMBS
DAVID LAUNDY



The father of the righteous
will greatly rejoice.



And he who raises a wise son
will delight in him.

